



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*** GLOBAL LITERACY EDITORIAL ***

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Our students need language studies to prepare for global future

Critical Language Fellows grant will expand opportunities to learn Mandarin Chinese and Arabic

By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

Wisconsin's national prominence in teaching world languages is a mark of pride and an important foundation for our students as they prepare for their roles in our 21st century global society. Annually, Wisconsin firms export more than \$12 billion worth of products to other countries, meaning there is a vast business need for understanding other languages and cultures. In our middle schools and high schools, half of our students study another language, ranking Wisconsin among the top of the nation for world language study. In addition to language studies, Wisconsin's active international education programs strive to offer cultural exposure and exchanges. Already this school year

- 10 education leaders from Thailand spent a week visiting Wisconsin schools,
- eight teachers from Japan brought Japanese language and culture to 17 schools from September through early December,
- 13 German educators participated in the Hessen-Wisconsin Teacher seminar focusing on Wisconsin's Changing Faces, and
- two heads of France's provincial K-16 education agencies visited Wisconsin and signed Memoranda of Understanding to further develop ties between schools, technical colleges, and universities.

While we have made solid efforts to encourage multicultural and world language experiences, there is more that we can do to ensure that our high school graduates are prepared for their global future. We need more students studying world languages, and they need to begin those studies earlier in their educational careers. In my 2007-09 education budget, I have requested funding for a *World Languages*

(more)

Initiative in elementary schools. The new grant program would help schools offer world language instruction in grades one through six, adding 25 sites per year over four years.

Wisconsin's language efforts received an added boost this fall through a U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language Assistance Program grant. Wisconsin was one of just four states—the others being North Carolina, Ohio, and Wyoming—to receive a grant for our Critical Language Fellows project. The three-year, \$720,665 grant will help Wisconsin prepare educators to teach Mandarin Chinese and Arabic in elementary, middle, and high schools. The project will work with Concordia Language Villages, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and departments of education in neighboring Midwest states to train 40 teachers for 15 new world language programs in Mandarin and Arabic, reaching an estimated 1,800 students.

Wisconsin currently has just four public school programs teaching Mandarin and none offering Arabic, yet these two languages are among the top 10 critical need languages identified by the federal government. In addition to training teachers and developing language programs in schools, our Critical Language Fellows project will develop a system of support for students who are heritage speakers of Mandarin and Arabic. Through interviews, research projects, and other activities conducted in their communities, these students will improve their heritage language skills and be able to earn high school language course credit.

By studying languages and discovering other cultures, our students will gain experiences that will expand their worldview and help them to live and work successfully in our 21st century global economy. Global literacy must be one of our top goals for educating our children.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >. This global literacy editorial is available electronically at < http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2006_161.pdf >.